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Contact: Judith Ingram
Communications Director
(202) 523-3240, ext. 127

WASHINGTON-The United States Commission on International Religious Freedom urges the U.S. State Department to reaffirm its past decision to deny a tourist visa to Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi, who has been invited to attend a conference in New Jersey this August celebrating Gujarati culture. Modi was previously denied entrance to the United States due to his role in riots that overtook the Indian state of Gujarat from February to May 2002 in which reportedly as many as 2,000 Muslims were killed, thousands raped, and over 200,000 displaced. Numerous reports, including reports of official bodies of the Government of India, have documented the role of Modi's state government in the planning and execution of the violence, and the failure to hold perpetrators accountable. Following Modi's invitation to attend conferences in the U.S. in 2005, the Commission successfully urged the State Department to revoke Modi's U.S. tourist visa. Despite pressure from the Indian government, the State Department revoked his visa under the Immigration and Nationality Act (INA), which prohibits foreign government officials who are "responsible for or directly carried out, at any time, particularly severe violations of religious freedom" from obtaining U.S. visas. This section was added to the INA by the International Religious Freedom Act of 1998. The Commission once again urges the State Department to announce Modi's ineligibility for a visa under the terms of the INA.

"We have not seen changes that would warrant a policy reversal," said Commission Chair Felice D. Gaer. "As official bodies of the government of India have found, Narendra Modi is culpable for the egregious and systematic human rights abuses wrought against thousands of India's Muslims. Mr. Modi must demonstrate to the State Department and to the American people why he-as a person found to have aided and abetted gross violations of human rights, including religious freedom-should now be eligible for a tourist visa."

Following the riots in 2002, India's National Human Rights Commission issued a report that

pointed to the role of Modi's government in the systematic murder of Muslims and the calculated destruction of Muslim homes and businesses. In 2003, the Indian central government found corruption and anti-Muslim bias to be so pervasive in the Gujarat judiciary that riot cases were shifted for trial to the neighboring state of Maharashtra. Despite this action, the lack of justice for victims remains a serious concern, as there have been very few court convictions in the six years since the religion-based riots. In 2007, a series of articles in the Indian publication Tehelka documented police officers and government officials on audio and videotape confessing that they facilitated the violence, at times at the direct behest of Modi.

“The inaction of Gujarat's government and police force in the face of severe violence against religious minorities is an inexcusable abuse of international human rights obligations,” Gaer said.